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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000232

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#) [ASSK](#)

SUBJECT: REGIME BLOCKS NLD LEADERS FROM VISITING ASSK

REF: A. RANGOON 206

[1](#)B. RANGOON 205

[1](#)C. RANGOON 199

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The five free members of the NLD's Central Executive Committee (CEC) attempted on February 17 to visit Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) at her Rangoon residence, where she is under house arrest, but were rebuffed by the Burmese regime. The "uncles" have in recent weeks taken a more visible and proactive role in leading party activities, including a quiet march on Union Day, meetings with diplomats, and correspondence with the regime that demands the release of NLD leaders and space to operate as a political party. The regime responded with veiled threats directed at the uncles and cut their phone lines, but has otherwise turned a blind eye to their activities. As for the regime's road map and a renewed National Convention, the CEC says "been there, done that" but refuses to take a public stand until ASSK and their other colleagues are released. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) We spoke on February 19 with NLD Central Executive Committee member U Nyunt Wei, who gave us detailed background regarding an unsuccessful attempt on February 17 by the five released members of the NLD CEC to visit ASSK, who remains under house arrest at her University Avenue residence in Rangoon. The CEC has been increasingly visible in recent weeks, including a successful effort at leading a quiet procession of party members and supporters through a portion of central Rangoon on Union Day (ref A). (Note: Of the nine-member CEC, five were freed from house arrest in November, while the most senior four members, including ASSK, remain in detention. End note.)

It's In the Mail

[1](#)3. (C) According to U Nyunt Wei, the NLD CEC had in recent months written three consecutive letters to SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe and PM General Khin Nyunt. The first two letters appealed for the release of ASSK and other NLD leaders detained without charges and requested an opportunity to visit ASSK at her home. Their third and most recent letter, delivered in early February, specified to the SPDC leaders that the NLD CEC wanted to speak with ASSK about top-level party matters. The NLD CEC has received no response to any of their letters.

[1](#)4. (C) Parallel to their latest letter, the NLD "uncles" told an SPDC intermediary that they planned to make a unilateral visit to ASSK's residence in the absence of a timely response to their request. The intermediary, a Burmese Army major, pleaded with the uncles not to proceed and promised he would report their concerns to his chain of command. However, U Nyunt Wei said, the uncles replied that "we won't wait indefinitely."

University Avenue Breakdown

[1](#)5. (C) On the morning of February 17, having received no response from the SPDC, the five elderly uncles flagged down two taxicabs and headed for University Avenue. U Nyunt Wei recounted with delight that the two cabbies, recognizing the uncles and their famous destination, refused to accept cab fare. Arriving at ASSK's heavily guarded compound at around 11:00 a.m., the uncles were seated across the street while military intelligence (MI) agents fetched a more senior-level interlocutor. The regime officer who appeared apologized to the uncles, but said that no visitors were allowed to enter ASSK's compound. "And besides," the major said, "if ASSK wants to see you, she will have to make an official request." The uncles suggested that the army major consult with ASSK directly on her wishes and the hapless officer demurred, responding "I don't have permission myself to enter the compound."

[1](#)6. (C) U Nyunt Wei said the uncles exchanged friendly banter for about an hour with their regime interlocutors. The senior regime officer on the scene claimed that the SPDC was undertaking efforts to "improve the political situation" and cited as an example the recent transfer from prison to house

arrest of NLD Vice Chairman U Tin Oo (ref B). In what the uncles interpreted as a threat to keep quiet, the major exhorted the NLD CEC not to create "untoward incidents which will inevitably cause problems and force the SPDC to blame the NLD leadership." Following what U Nyunt Wei described as a "light standoff," MI agents escorted the uncles home in government vehicles.

A Train to Nowhere

17. (C) U Nyunt Wei took advantage of our meeting to reiterate the CEC's position on the regime's road map for democracy. "We will not take a public stand," he said, "unless all nine members of our Central Committee can meet together freely to discuss our views." We inquired about the CEC's ability to get input from ASSK on the road map and other party issues while she is under house arrest. U Nyunt Wei smiled and said, "We have no official communications with her," intimating that the uncles make use of a back channel to communicate with ASSK.

18. (C) With regard to the December Thai-hosted meeting on Burma, U Nyunt Wei said that the CEC had written to all of the Bangkok participants to exchange views. To date, the uncles have not heard a single word back from China, India, or any of the ASEAN participants. U Nyunt Wei said he was particularly galled at not hearing from the Indians, the "so-called largest democracy in the world." He added, however, that the CEC greatly appreciates the ongoing support and contact from the U.S. and the U.K. missions. "Without you, we have no one," he said.

19. (C) However, Ambassadors from Australia, Italy, France, and Germany and the Japanese political counselor have all responded to the NLD appeal and met with the released CEC members in recent weeks. U Nyunt Wei said that while the NLD leaders appreciated the opportunity to hear first-hand about the Bangkok meeting, the diplomats all had a similar message which warned the NLD that "the train is leaving, and you need to get on board (with the road map process)." The NLD leaders responded, "we've been on that train and it's not going anywhere worthwhile."

10. (C) U Nyunt Wei said that it was impossible to envision participating in a National Convention without the release of ASSK and other NLD leaders and the re-opening of NLD offices. He concluded that it would be "foolish" for the NLD to repeat the failed experience of the 1993 Convention which was convened under similar circumstances and failed miserably. "We got off that train for a good reason," he said.

Comment: Taking Charge

11. (C) The released NLD CEC members are clearly pushing the envelope with the SPDC. While they may have some limited contact with ASSK, we suspect the main motivating factor in pursuing more visible tactics may be to appease the youth wing of the NLD, which by all accounts is frustrated with the stalemate and growing restless. Also, ASSK has expressed in the past her own desire to see the CEC take a more proactive role in leading the party when she is incarcerated or otherwise isolated by the SPDC. The regime has responded to the feisty uncles by cutting the phone lines of several CEC members and restricting the others to outgoing calls only (which prohibits the uncles from receiving inquiries from international journalists). However, overall SPDC intimidation since their late 2003 release has been, by regime standards, fairly limited. End Comment.

Martinez